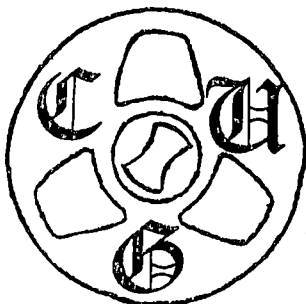


Computer Users' Group
December, 1984 Vol 7 No 4

ANSWERS

We've received quite a few comments in our suggestion box recently. We really do take these suggestions seriously, so here are some responses to comments we've received this semester:

Someone suggested that a sign be posted in the JEF rooms to the effect that unattended terminals be considered free. We spoke to the Computer Centre, and sure enough this was done; we endorse this suggestion whole-heartedly. When there are more people than there are terminals, it is the height of rudeness to leave a terminal unattended and expect no-one else to use it.

It was suggested that the waiting time on JEF between successive log-ins be reduced from 5 to 3 minutes. We brought this one up to the Computer Centre as well, but they disagreed. Sorry -- but the difference would have been minimal anyway. Go have a cup of coffee between sessions!

A number of people have been complaining about POD service; a few words of explanation are very badly needed here: First of all, daytime PODs are paid employees of the Computer Centre. If the POD office is closed during the daytime, you have a legitimate complaint; the problem is that the POD office never IS closed during the day except when it's unavoidable. Most daytime PODs also have other duties for the Centre, and sometimes they can't make their shift; if it's a choice

between taking a regular shift in the POD office or fixing a sudden and serious bug in JEF, I think most of you will agree that the JEF bug is more important... and when there's no daytime POD, the reason is usually something of this sort. Even then the Centre tries to find a replacement POD, but this is not always possible at short notice. Yes, it's annoying; but please be patient!

The evening POD service is even more badly misunderstood; as it happens, the evening PODs are all VOLUNTEERS! Evening POD service is organized by CUG, and most PODs are CUG executive members. We don't receive any payment for the work we do; yet most of the time we're there, and the level of service provided is generally high. When we don't show up, it's almost always because we're students too and we have our own assignments to worry about. It's unfortunate that the time you need us most is generally the very time that we have the most work to do; but think about it: assume that you have a standard load of 5 courses; if you're in your second or third year of computer science, chances are that you have at least 3 or 4 computer science courses; you probably have a part-time job as well; now ask yourself -- would you have three hours of your time to donate during midterm exams? What happens when you have two or three major programming assignments due the day after your scheduled volunteer POD shift? Sometimes POD work requires a superhuman effort -- and we generally make that effort. When the POD office is closed at night, chances are that the student scheduled to volunteer his or her

time that night is busy on a 2000-line FORTRAN or COBOL program. If it really bothers you to see a closed door in the evening, you are of course welcome to volunteer your own time... and if you don't think you're capable of doing so, then at least please stop complaining about it!

Still on the subject of PODs, someone commented that the POD office is very crowded; someone else suggested that there be at least two PODs working at the same time, and that POD hours be extended on weekends. These are excellent suggestions, but they're subject to a practical limitation: there just isn't money to pay for that kind of extended service! At present the only weekend POD service is provided on Saturday afternoons by a CUG volunteer. CUG can approach the Computer Centre and ask them for extended regular POD service, but we know in advance that the answer would be no, simply because the Centre couldn't do it if they wanted to. CUG would be happy to organize extended volunteer service, but we could only do this if there were a sufficiently large number of volunteers out there willing to help. Any takers? If so, please contact us in H-983, telephone 879-7329.

One person suggested that professors should allow extensions on assignments when the computer is down frequently. There are two responses to this: First of all, it's well known that if you leave an assignment to the last day, there is a 99% probability that the computer will be down when you need it; this is a corollary to Murphy's Law. However, the earlier you start, the more the machine will be available. Most of us are guilty of procrastination, and in such a case it's our own fault. On the other hand, many professors have completely unreasonable attitudes concerning assignment submission -- including, I'm sorry to say, most professors in computer science. Okay, then, get the students in your

class together; if the whole class approaches the professor, he'll probably be much more amenable to reason -- after all, you outnumber him! If that doesn't work, there are channels in the university to follow if you're not satisfied with the grading of a course. This isn't really CUG's domain, but come to us in person and we'll try to help you anyway.

Quite a few people suggested that the Centre should stay open for longer hours; as you know, this was done anyway (No, CUG had nothing to do with it). The Computer Centre has made a habit of keeping extended hours at the end of term for the past two years or so. However, what might come as a surprise to some people is the fact that the computers themselves run 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can sign out a key at the Security desk in the Hall Building lobby and use most terminal rooms after hours, as long as you're on the "After Hours Pass" list. Most computer science students are already on this list, and if you're not on it, then speak to the Security people and they'll tell you how to get on. PS, to the person who mentioned that McGill keeps their system running all night: McGill has exactly the same situation that we do. Their computer system runs for 24 hours a day, but their terminal rooms close at midnight on weekdays.

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To all: good luck with your exams, and have a great holiday season! Try not to get too close to a terminal during your vacation... Best wishes to all January graduates, and to all remaining unfortunates -- see you in 1985!

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| Programming Hints -- Part 5 |
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